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LIBRARY WORK WITH CHILDREN

BY ARTHUR E. BOSTWICK, *Librarian, St. Louis Public Library*

What I have to say was prepared under the erroneous impression that it was to be printed in advance of this meeting, and that you were to read it instead of listening to it. I was strictly limited in the length of it, which accounts for its brevity.

Children constitute a separate class in the community. Children's clothes, children's amusements, children's food, must all be considered separately from the same subjects in their relationships to adults. It is natural, therefore, that libraries have been forced to deal separately with children. The older libraries dealt with them by disregarding them. The first library that I used as a boy had no books for children. When children began to use public libraries it soon became evident that separate reading-rooms, separate book-collections and a separate staff would greatly facilitate the business of the library, not only with the children but with adults. My conception of library work with children is simply that adults and children both obtain more satisfactory service at the library if they get it separately, and that the business of a children's department is to study the way in which the children may be best served, having regard to the differences between them and the adults, their present interests and requirements as they see them now, and those interests and requirements as they will appear when the children, grown to adult age, look back upon their relations with the library and their experiences in it.

The conditions under which such service may be rendered may be different with different groups of children and in different localities. They may be conceived differently by different librarians; and yet the methods employed by each may be the best for him to employ and the best for the children that use his library. I would encourage each librarian to work out his own problem, never imitating without certainty

that the thing imitated will work as well with him as it does elsewhere; and realizing also that what he has found to be best in his own library and his own city may not be the best for others.

Library work with children has been more thoroughly systematized than that with adults. In the first place, it needs more systematization. In the second place, those in charge of it have looked upon themselves as specialists. They have regarded their task with a special enthusiasm, not altogether devoid of a kind of fanaticism. They have shown all the good points, and all the faults, of the specialist. It is unfortunate, I think, that they have all been women, although, if it is necessary to turn the work over to one sex, the women are the ones to do it. They have special love for children and special aptitude for dealing with them. But I should like to see one male assistant in every children's department. It would do no harm to have fifty per cent of our children's librarians men. I do not know that our present staffs would object, but I have yet to see the man who would like to specialize in this field. We meet with the same trouble in school education, in the primary and grammar grades. This is one of the problems to be solved by those who are studying the best methods of rendering library service to children.

The children's room in a library, or the children's department of a library system should do anything whatever that proves to be effective in bettering library service to its children, whether any other library does that thing or not. It should not adopt any method or introduce any innovation simply because it has been successful elsewhere—except experimentally, to ascertain whether it will also be successful in the place of trial. It should drop everything that is not shown clearly to be of advantage

in rendering library service to the particular children, in the particular place in which it is working. The children's librarian should remember that the library exists only because the community believes that necessary service can be rendered through its agency; and that she herself exists only because experience has shown that the sum of service rendered by the

library to the community is greater when it is rendered to adults and children separately. The criticisms that I have to make on library work with children as usually conducted by children's librarians in the children's rooms of public libraries may all be reduced, I think, to one—the occasional neglect of the fact stated just above or the failure to realize it.

THE PLACE OF THE SCHOOL LIBRARY IN MODERN EDUCATION

BY JAMES FLEMING HOSIC, *Chicago Normal College*

The campaign for better school libraries which is being waged with so much spirit and success in all parts of the United States is based upon a new conception of education and is, therefore, in harmony with the efforts which are being put forth to improve the schools in other ways. It is not merely the outgrowth of ambition springing up in the minds of a few professional librarians. Nor is it traceable to the efforts of publishers to increase the sale of the products of their presses. It is part and parcel of the onward movement which is rapidly transforming the whole educational system of America and which is destined to give us, ultimately, schools adapted to the training of young people in a democracy.

The education of the day is modern in two principal respects. In the first place, the doctrine of formal intellectual discipline through hard and disagreeable effort expended upon intrinsically valueless material is now largely discredited. In its stead is being built up a doctrine based upon the theory of native and acquired tendencies and capacities, to be developed through favorable environment in the direction of sound knowledge, useful habits, elevating ideals, and satisfying interests and appreciations. We are ceasing to talk of cultivating the memory. Psychologists tell us that in all probability the native power of retentiveness cannot be greatly altered by anything we can do in the

schools. We speak now of cultivating a memory for specific valuable facts and of developing the power of retaining certain types of facts. One person, for example, becomes deeply interested in all that pertains to plants. He forms the habit of remembering plants, their names, their habitat, their methods of propagation, and so on. Another person with quite different tastes may early conceive the idea that he would like to possess a library. Hence he examines every book that comes into his hands, noting carefully the title, the author's name, publisher, the price, and the principal contents. Presently he has a surprising fund of general knowledge of books. As with memory, so with skill and accuracy. Granting that we may come to cherish the ideal of being accurate and skillful, we must still maintain that the application of skill is specific. The fact that one can play the piano does not argue that one can play golf, though certain powers developed in the one will doubtless be of some assistance in the other. In short, education has ceased to be a process of strengthening mental faculties and has become a process of developing definite tendencies and capacities into certain specific usable attainments.

In the second place, the school course is being reorganized from the social point of view. This means, among other things, that the basic needs of contemporary society must be considered in the determina-